



The Central Valley and EPA

A Newsletter from EPA's Office of Public Affairs

Summer 2001

Dear Reader,

I invite you to browse this latest issue of our Central Valley newsletter from EPA's Pacific Southwest Region which highlights many projects and partnerships in which EPA is involved. As you will see, EPA continues to be an available source of funding, technical assistance, and information for those concerned about the environment and human health in California's Central Valley. We are based in San Francisco and similar projects are underway in other communities in our region, which includes Arizona, Nevada, Hawaii, the Pacific Islands, Tribes, and all of California. Whether you represent a local business, local government, or non-profit, I hope you find this sampling of environmental work informative. Please don't hesitate to contact us in seeking feedback or airing concerns.

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Business & Development Navigating Environmental Mazes



The Sacramento Business Environmental Resource Center was established in 1993 as a one-stop, non-regulatory Permit Assistance Center to help Sacramento County Businesses understand and comply with environmental regulations. The Center offers free and confidential consultations on both environmental and non-environmental issues. In addition, it provides money-saving pollution prevention ideas to businesses, and coordinates an annual Pollution Prevention Awards Program. Services include providing fact sheets, guidance documents, ombudsman/facilitation services, as well as conducting seminars and workshops. For more information, visit www.sacberc.org/.

Helping Business Prevent Pollution

A number of local agencies in the Fresno area have joined together to form the Fresno Pollution Prevention Committee, one of six such committees in the state. These committees share resources, streamline business access to pollution prevention information and technical assistance, and develop new materials and approaches that help all the agencies better serve

their customers. The new committee first met in March, co-hosted by the Fresno Water Conservation Program and Cal-EPA's Fresno Permit Assistance Center. Participating agencies include Kings, Tulare, Kern, and Fresno Counties, the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District, Fresno Stormwater Agency, and several local sanitation services. The group is currently developing its goals and priorities. For more information on the Fresno Committee contact Annee Ferranti at the Permit Assistance Center (559-498-1343) and visit www.calgold.ca.gov/Fresno/.

Realizing a Redevelopment Vision



The City of Stockton began realizing its vision for the redevelopment and revitalization of the Greater Stockton Waterfront and nearby Downtown area with grand opening ceremonies held on June 29, 2001, for the Dean Decarli Waterfront Square - a former Brownfields site. This former parking lot was transformed into a \$6 million open space water plaza that will serve as a gathering place for residents and visitors to Downtown Stockton. The City's Redevelopment Agency used a \$400,000 EPA grant to identify light to moderately contaminated industrial properties known as "Brownfields," to conduct environmental testing, and to develop cleanup plans and cost

estimates. The Square serves as a catalyst for connecting the Waterfront area with future downtown development projects including renovation of the historic Hotel Stockton. EPA funding was also used to conduct environmental work at two properties, adjoining the Hotel Stockton, where current plans call for the construction of an 18-screen cineplex with related retail and restaurant uses.

The City received an additional \$500,000 from EPA to capitalize a Brownfields Clean Up Revolving Loan Program, which creates a financing mechanism for property owners and others to facilitate cleanup of contaminated Brownfields sites. Over \$100 million in Downtown projects have been completed, are currently under construction, or are planned within the next few years. Learn more about the Brownfields program at www.epa.gov/region09/waste/brown/index.html.

Partnerships

Protecting Wetlands With Land Trusts

EPA has successfully partnered with a variety of federal and State agencies, key national conservation groups, and an array of locally-based land trusts to protect approximately 40,000 acres of imperiled vernal pool landscapes across 13 counties within California's Central Valley. This effort has been fueled by EPA grant funding and millions of dollars leveraged from public and private sources. Successes include The Nature Conservancy's \$14 million purchase of the nearly-pristine 13,000-acre Howard Ranch located within the Cosumnes River watershed in Sacramento County made possible in part by an \$8 million loan from EPA's Clean Water State Revolving Fund. The Ranch encompasses the transition zone between the vernal pools on the Valley floor and the oak-studded foothills of the Sierra Nevada.

In another major accomplishment, through our partnership with the Trust for Public Land and the local Sierra Los Tulares Land Trust, an array of public and private partners secured protection for the 725-acre Herbert Wetland Prairie Reserve. This new reserve was dedicated in April 2001. The site represents the last large tract of vernal pool wetlands adjacent to a riparian corridor within Tulare County. EPA provided \$35,000 for the local trust to help catalyze the acquisition of the

property and a "Vision Plan" for the Herbert Reserve to serve as an ecological anchor of a restored wildlife corridor reconnecting two existing preserves — Kaweah Oaks and Creighton Ranch.

Sustainable Agriculture: Developing "Win-Win" Solutions



EPA's Regional Agriculture Team has been working with the agricultural community in voluntary partnerships to develop sustainable farming practices that minimize the use of the most toxic and polluting agricultural chemicals — without sacrificing production. Partners include agricultural commodity groups, hundreds of individual farmers, University of California research and extension personnel, environmental groups, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, and local Resource Conservation Districts.

Since 1995, EPA has provided technical assistance and approximately \$1 million in grant funding to support partnerships for research and education on environmentally-friendly methods of growing more than a dozen key crops and managing dairies. Much of this work has been coordinated through the University of California's Biologically Integrated Farming Systems projects which directly involve farmers who develop, field test and help other farmers adopt innovative sustainable farming systems. In addition, commodity groups help publicize results among the agricultural community. Most of the participating farms, orchards, and vineyards are in California's Central Valley.

One notable accomplishment this last year was the cultivation on nine demonstration farms of 1334 acres of rice in Butte County using 50% less toxic herbicides and 20% less nitrogen fertilizer than the county average, with no reduction in crop yields. These ongoing collaborations between growers, scientists, and EPA has benefits for everyone with a stake in farming: growers save money by using less chemicals; workers have safer working conditions; consumers get safer food; and the environment is protected. A report to the California legislature describing the success of these programs is available at www.sarep.ucdavis.edu/BIFS/bifs01/index.htm.



Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture

The Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture is a public-private partnership, in which EPA is one of many Board members working to implement the North American Waterfowl Management Plan in the Central Valley. The Joint Venture uses a "bottom-up" approach where local input is used in making final decisions critical to the long-term needs of waterfowl populations. Members work to protect and restore existing and former wetlands, enhance waterfowl habitat on private agricultural land, and secure a firm water supply for conservation areas. Recently the Board endorsed an "all-bird" perspective, which considers all birds using the habitat and not just waterfowl. EPA's contributions to the Joint Venture include sharing information on protection programs and grant opportunities, providing expertise on wetlands and aquatic habitat, and funding projects sponsored by Joint Venture partners. Other Board members include the American Farmland Trust, California Waterfowl Association, Ducks Unlimited, Inc., Trust for Public Land, and numerous state and federal agencies. For more information about the Joint Venture, including newsletters, go to www.mp.usbr.gov/cvhjv/.

New Approaches to Transportation Planning

Transportation planning often becomes mired in disagreements among government agencies, community members and interest groups, so the Partnership for Integrated Planning in Merced County has taken a new regional approach. Since conflict often stems from concerns that the environment and important land uses are not considered at the beginning of the planning process, Merced County, federal, state and local stakeholders will work together to identify and resolve natural resource and land use issues early on. Leading the Partnership with support and grant funding are the Merced County Association of Governments, CalTrans, the U.S. Department of Transportation, and EPA.

The Partnership will record data on key environmental features, important agricultural lands and other land uses in a geographic information system (GIS) to generate a number of transportation scenarios. These different scenarios will then be considered by the stakeholders and the public in a series of workshops in 2002 to determine the best

locations for transportation development, while protecting the environment and important land uses. The lessons learned from this partnership will ultimately be shared with other California communities embarking on their own transportation planning. For more information, contact Suzanne Marr of EPA at 415-744-1974.

National News

Jean-Marie Peltier Assumes Key Post

EPA Administrator Whitman tapped Jean-Marie Peltier of Newcastle for the position of Counselor to the Administrator on Agriculture Policy. Jean-Marie's position will help integrate the concerns of the agriculture community when making decisions on how best to protect natural resources. She will also serve as the central contact for EPA cooperation with USDA. Jean-Marie most recently was President of the California Citrus Quality Council and has served on numerous industry and government advisory committees.



Health

Improving Drinking Water Quality

EPA's Environmental Justice Program awarded a \$100,000 grant to the California Department of Health Services for a community education project conducted by the United Farm Workers in the San Joaquin Valley. Nearly 400,000 migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their families live in the lower San Joaquin Valley, where groundwater supplies are stressed by agricultural processes, including the application of pesticides. Local communities have raised issues regarding the discolored appearance, poor taste, and foul smell of the water. Adding to the concerns of the residents, the water districts are small and their systems are antiquated.



Although drinking water providers are required to conduct regular testing, these small systems sometimes fail to perform the required testing and reporting, which can strain their finances. This grant project will allow the state, the United Farm Workers, and the small providers to find ways not only to better communicate but also to ensure that the water is consistently safe to drink. At this early stage, meetings have already been held with the various stakeholders to determine the issues and how best to try to address them.

Online Resources

Real-Time Air Quality on the Internet



Air pollution affects everyone but real-time information on local air pollution levels has not been widely available — until now. EPA's AIRNow web site www.epa.gov/airnow/index.html gives everyone easy access to national air quality information (including the Central Valley) and daily air quality forecasts. The information is presented with easy-to-understand air quality maps, forecast displays, and webcams. EPA funded the development of the AIRNow web site in partnership with states and local air quality agencies.

Toxic Facilities Online

The Toxics Release Inventory (TRI), published by the EPA, gives communities access to vital information regarding toxic chemicals that are being used, manufactured, treated, transported, or released into the environment. People can use annual TRI data to track toxics use at local facilities

and evaluate potential health risks for their community. TRI information can be used as a starting point for constructive dialogue with manufacturing facilities in your area. Anyone can access TRI data via the EPA TRI Web site www.epa.gov/tri/.

*Special thanks for assisting with this newsletter to:
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**Grant Opportunities
for Communities**
www.epa.gov/region09/funding/index.html

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